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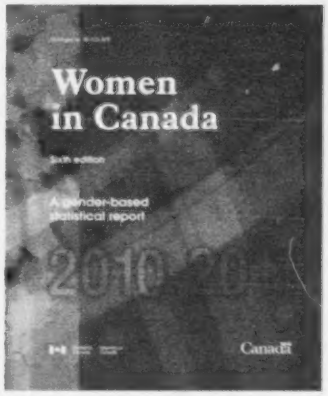

Women with Activity Limitations

by Susan Crompton

December 2011

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Statistics Canada
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Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report

Women with Activity Limitations

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

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December 2011

Catalogue no. 89-503-X

ISBN 978-1-100-17400-6

Frequency: Occasional

Ottawa

Cette publication est également disponible en français.

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.	not available for any reference period
..	not available for a specific reference period
...	not applicable
0	true zero or a value rounded to zero
0s	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
p	preliminary
r	revised
x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
E	use with caution
F	too unreliable to be published

Acknowledgements

This publication was made possible thanks to the collaboration and financial support of Status of Women Canada, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Justice Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Health Canada, Canadian Heritage, Public Health Agency of Canada, Public Works and Government Services Canada, Public Safety Canada, Western Economic Diversification Canada, Canadian Human Rights Commission, Department of National Defence, National Council of Welfare, Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

This edition of *Women in Canada* was prepared by the Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division of Statistics Canada. The Statistics Canada team would like to acknowledge Status of Women for their role coordinating the review process with all partners.

Women with Activity Limitations

by Susan Crompton

Introduction

A long-term health problem or chronic condition can prevent someone from participating in necessary activities—doing housework, making meals—or in leisure activities—going places, doing things with family and friends. The social environment may also prevent a person with such a condition from taking part in events; for example, when an event lacks ramps to facilitate physical access or does not provide technical aids such as hearing devices.[1]

In this chapter, a person is defined as having an activity limitation if they report that they have a long-term physical or psychological health problem, or a chronic condition, that is severe enough to "often" affect their normal functioning at home, at work, at school, or in another domain such as transportation or leisure activities.[2]

This chapter will use data from the 2009 Canadian Community Health Survey to examine the age structure of the population with activity limitations, the different types of limitations, as well as the education and income of women with and without activity limitations.

Measuring the population with activity limitations

The population with activity limitations is constructed using a set of five questions in the 2009 Canadian Community Health Survey. Respondents were classified as having an activity limitation if they answered "often" to at least one of the following questions:

1. Do you have any difficulty hearing, seeing, communicating, walking, climbing stairs, bending, learning or doing any similar activities?
2. Does a long-term physical condition or mental condition or health problem reduce the amount or the kind of activity you can do at home?
3. ...at school? (if the respondent was attending school)
4. ...at work? (if the respondent was employed)
5. ...in other activities, for example, transportation or leisure?

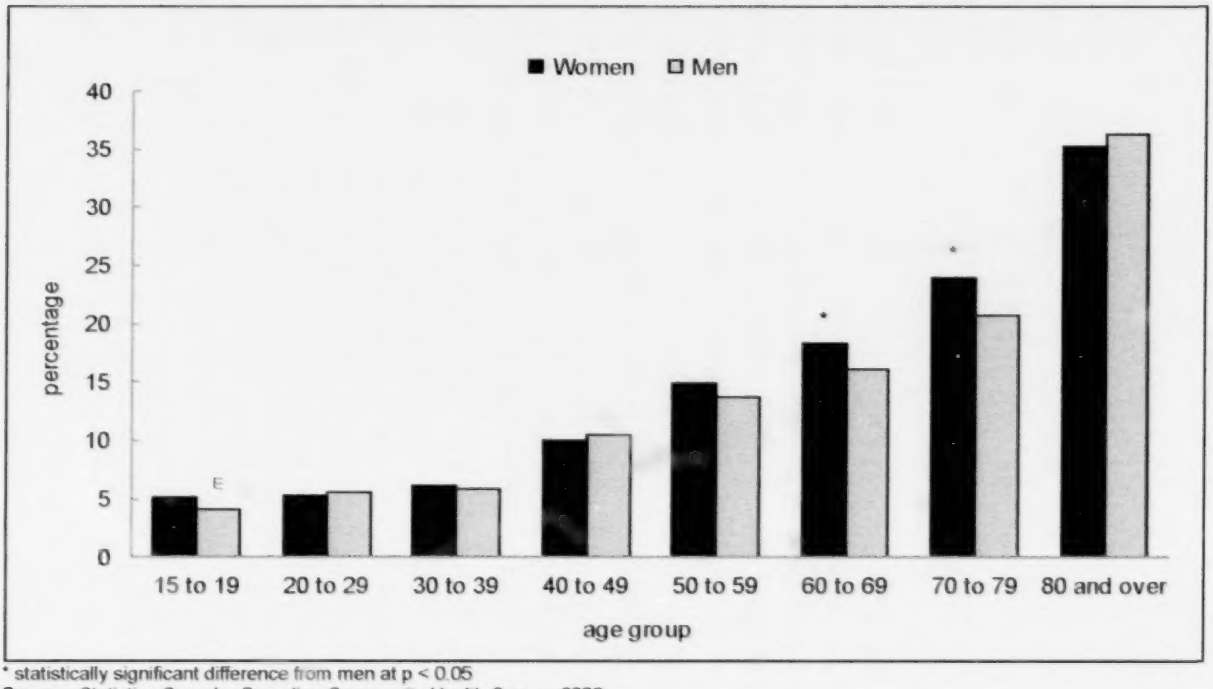
Women are more likely than men to have an activity limitation

In 2009, 12% of women aged 15 and over reported that they had an activity limitation. That is, about 1.7 million Canadian women had a long-term health condition or problem that often made it difficult for them to function normally in everyday life. (A long-term condition is a condition that is expected to last, or has already lasted, six months or more.) Somewhat fewer men aged 15 and over reported having an activity limitation, at 11% or just under 1.5 million.

1. For a more detailed discussion of the concept of social-functional activity limitation, and how the ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health) has been operationalized in Statistics Canada's health surveys, see: MacKenzie, A., M. Hurst and S. Crompton. 2009. "Living with disabilities series: Defining disability in the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey". *Canadian Social Trends* no. 88. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-008-XWE. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2009002/article/11024-eng.htm (accessed November 7, 2011).
2. Having an activity limitation can also be a temporary condition; for example, someone who has had a knee or hip replacement may face difficulties performing daily activities during months of recovery, but later regain their full functional mobility.

Everyday tasks generally become more difficult as the human body ages: the joints get stiff, the muscles weaken and chronic illnesses take their toll. So it is not surprising that the proportion of women reporting an activity limitation increases steadily with age. Only 5% of women in their teens or 20s reported having an activity limitation. For women in their 40s, this proportion doubled to 10%, and it almost doubled again to 18% for those in their 60s. By the time women reached their 80s, more than one in three (35%) had a long-term health condition or problem that often restricted their daily activities in some way (Chart 1).

Chart 1
Prevalence of activity limitations among women and men aged 15 and over, by age group, Canada, 2009



* statistically significant difference from men at $p < 0.05$
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009

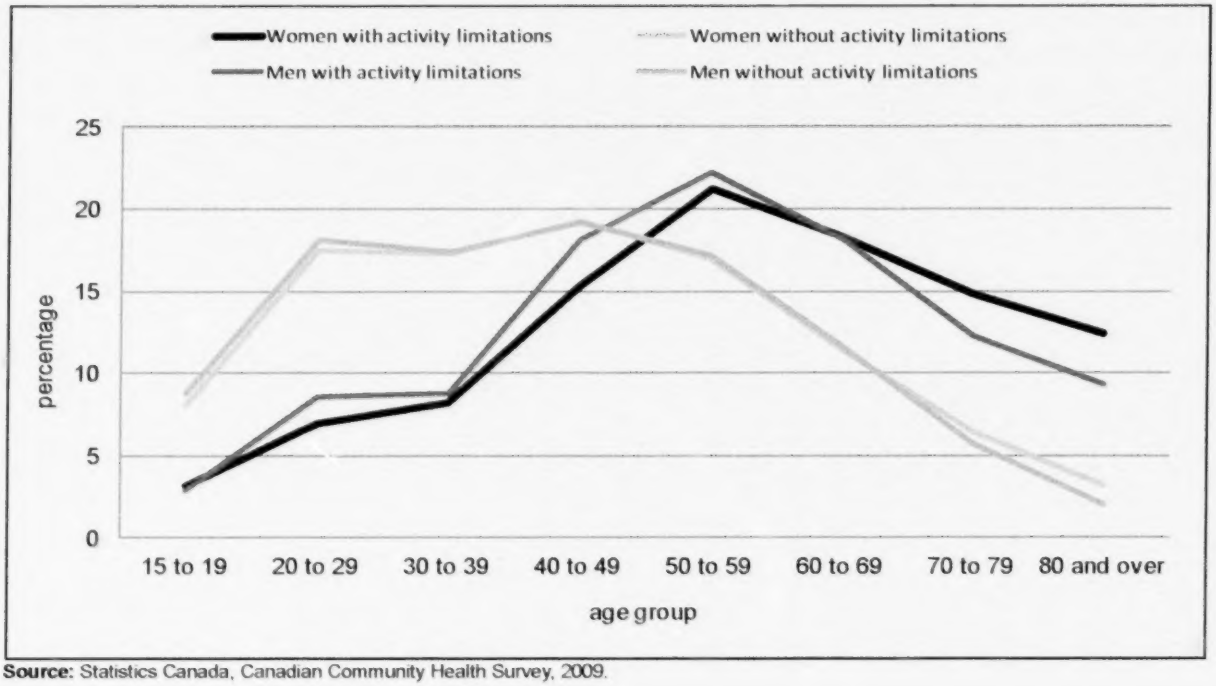
Rates of activity limitation are the same for women and men until they reach their 60s and 70s. In these two age groups, women had a significantly higher likelihood of reporting an activity limitation: among those in their 60s, 18% of women versus 16% of men, and among those in their 70s, 24% versus 21%.

The population with activity limitations is substantially older

The higher prevalence of activity limitations among people in their 40s and over reflects the older age structure of the population with activity limitations. Over 2 in 5 women with activity limitations (45%) are aged 60 and over; this is more than twice the proportion of women without activity limitations (21%). The same pattern is true of the male population with activity limitations (Chart 2).

The effects of this skewed age structure show themselves in many of the other demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the population with activity limitations. For instance, the higher rate of widowhood and lower levels of income and labour force participation of women with activity limitations, compared with the rest of the population, will be discussed later in this chapter.

Chart 2
Distribution of population with and without activity limitations, by age group, Canada, 2009



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

Pain is the most common cause of poor functional health among women with activity limitations

The Health Utility Index (HUI) developed by McMaster University is used to assess a person's "functional health". It measures how well a person is able to see, to hear, to walk, to talk, to handle objects and to remember and think; it also assesses a person's emotional well-being and the amount of pain they experience. When all these components are rolled up into the HUI, the overall average functional health score of women with activity limitations is 0.57 out of 1. This score is considered to be an indicator of "moderate to poor" functional health. In contrast, the HUI score for women without activity limitations averaged 0.91, indicating that they have "good to full" functional health.[3]

Of the eight components of the HUI, pain was by far the major contributor to poorer functional health among women with activity limitations. Over 1 in 5 women with activity limitations (21%) reported that they did not participate in most activities because it was too painful for them. Another 2 in 5 (38%) said that pain prevented them from performing some activities (Table 1).

3. An overall HUI score of 0.8 to 1.0 is considered to indicate 'good to full' functional health; scores below 0.8 are considered to indicate 'moderate to poor' functional health. See: Statistics Canada. "Functional Health 2009." *Health Fact Sheets* no. 2. Catalogue 82-625. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2010002/article/11271-eng.htm

Table 1
Women and men aged 15 and over, by degree of difficulty with functional health components and activity limitations status, Canada, 2009

Functional health component	Women		Men	
	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations
	score			
Health Utility Index score[1]	**0.57** *	**0.91**	**0.61** *	**0.92**
	percentage			
Pain				
Prevents most activities	20.6 *	0.6	20.3 *	0.6
Prevents some activities	37.8 *	8.0	27.3 *	5.7
Pain does not prevent activities	4.5	4.7	6.6 *	4.8
No pain or discomfort	37.1 *	86.7	45.8 *	89.0
Cognition				
Very difficult to remember or think	7.5 *	1.3	8.7 *	1.1
Somewhat forgetful and some difficulty thinking	14.5 *	4.5	12.3 *	4.4
Somewhat forgetful or some difficulty thinking	24.8 *	18.6	26.8 *	19.2
Able to remember and think	53.2 *	75.6	52.2 *	75.3
Emotional health				
Somewhat to very unhappy	11.5 *	2.1	13.4 *	2.2
Somewhat happy	26.6 *	17.3	27.7 *	19.0
Happy and interested in life	61.9 *	80.6	58.9 *	78.8
Mobility				
Cannot walk at all	2.4	F	1.7	x
Need wheelchair or help from people	8.2 *	0.2 E	4.2	F
Difficulty walking	18.5 *	1.2	14.5 *	0.8
Able to walk without difficulty	71.0 *	98.6	79.5 *	99.1
Hearing				
Unable to hear	F	F	0.4 E	x
Able to hear with hearing aid	8.9 *	1.7	16.9 *	2.1
Able to hear well	90.6 *	98.3	82.8 *	97.9
Vision				
Unable to see even with lenses	2.1	F	1.5 E*	0 S
Unable to see close or distance even with lenses	2.9 *	0.7	2.5 *	0.4
Able to see well with or without lenses	95.0 *	99.3	95.9 *	99.5
Dexterity				
Need help with tasks	2.1 *	0.1 E	2.5 E	F
Some limitations but no help needed	1.5 *	0.2 E	0.8 E*	0.1 E
Full use of hands and fingers	96.3 *	99.7	96.7 *	99.8
Speech				
Able to be partially understood	2.2 *	0.3 E	3.9 *	0.3
Able to be well understood	97.8 *	99.7	96.1 *	99.7

* statistically significant difference from same sex without activity limitations at $p < 0.05$

1. The Health Utility Index produces a score ranging from 1 (perfect health), through 0 (health status equal to death). A score of 0.8 to 1.0 indicates "good to full" functional health; a score below 0.8 indicates "moderate to poor" functional health.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

Just over 1 in 10 women with activity limitations (12%) indicated they had poor emotional well-being, saying that they were somewhat to very unhappy. Almost as many reported they had difficulty walking, with about 1 in 10 women with activity limitations (11%) needing help from other people or a wheelchair, or being unable to walk at all.

Over 7% of women with activity limitations reported impaired functioning for cognitive tasks, saying they found it very difficult to remember and to think; this finding probably reflects the much higher concentration of senior women in the population with activity limitations. In other key areas of functional health (vision, speech and dexterity), only 2% of women with activity limitations had severe difficulties.

Given the high prevalence of pain reported by women with activity limitations, it seems reasonable to conclude that pain may be the primary mediator (if not the cause) of poor functional health in several key areas of everyday life. For example, 41% of women with activity limitations who had severe ambulatory problems reported that pain prevented them from performing most activities. Similarly, 31% of those who were somewhat to very unhappy had levels of pain that excluded them from performing most activities (data not shown).

Women perceive that their activity limitations stem largely from disease or illness

In 2009, about 41% of women with activity limitations attributed them to disease or illness, and another 16% to what they described simply as ageing. Men were less likely to identify these causes than women, at 29% and 12%, respectively (Table 2).

Table 2
Women and men with activity limitations aged 15 and over, by main cause of activity limitation, Canada, 2009

Main cause of activity limitation	Women	Men
	percentage	
Illness or disease	40.7 *	29.5
Ageing	16.5 *	11.8
Accident	**19.7 ***	**28.9**
Motor vehicle accident	6.9	6.7
Accident at work	5.2 *	13.2
Accident at home	2.9	2.8
Other type of accident	4.7 *	6.3
Existed at birth or genetic	9.7	10.3
Work conditions	5.2 *	13.0
Emotional or mental health problem	4.7	3.5
Other (includes use of alcohol or drugs)	3.6	3.1 E

* statistically significant difference from men at $p < 0.05$
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

On the other hand, men had almost a 1.5 times greater probability of identifying an accident (especially a work accident) as the origin of their activity limitation, at 29% compared with 20% of women. The likelihood that a man's working conditions were the source of his activity limitation was also much higher than a woman's (13% versus 5%).

Half of women with activity limitations have arthritis and/or back problems

Among people with activity limitations, 9 in 10 women (91%) had been diagnosed with at least one chronic health problem or condition, as had 86% of men. However, it is very common for people with activity limitations to have more than one health problem: 34% of women in this population had three to four chronic conditions, and 20% had five or more; the corresponding figures for men were 28% and 12%, respectively (data not shown). The most common chronic conditions among women with activity limitations were arthritis (50%) and back problems (47%). High blood pressure affected close to two in five women (37%). Other commonly diagnosed chronic conditions were migraines (22%) and mood disorders (22%), such as depression, manic depression, bipolar disorder and dysthymia (Table 3).

Table 3
Prevalence of selected chronic conditions, women and men with activity limitations aged 15 and over, Canada, 2009

Chronic condition	Women	Men
	percentage	
Total — Chronic conditions	**91.4** *	**86.4**
Arthritis	50.3 *	35.4
Back problems	47.2 *	42.7
High blood pressure	36.7 *	31.9
Migraines	22.4 *	12.2
Mood disorders	21.7 *	15.3
Anxiety disorders	15.5 *	11.4
Asthma	15.4 *	9.5
Bowel disorders	14.6 *	6.5
Urinary incontinence[1]	15.3 *	9.0
Heart disease	13.2 *	15.5
Diabetes	13.1 *	16.5
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease[2]	12.3	12.8
Ulcers (stomach or intestinal)	8.1	8.9
Effects of a stroke	5.6	5.3
Cancer	4.8	5.0
Alzheimer's or dementia[2]	2.4	2.9 E

* statistically significant difference from men at $p < 0.05$
1. Only for those aged 25 and over.
2. Only for those aged 35 and over.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

In general, most chronic health problems were more prevalent among women than men who had activity limitations. The exceptions were heart disease and diabetes, which were slightly more common among men with activity limitations. The likelihood of having chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), ulcers, cancer, Alzheimer's or the effects of a stroke did not differ between the sexes.

Over one-quarter of women with a chronic physical health problem also have a psychological condition

Women with chronic physical health conditions also often experience psychological problems such as depression or anxiety. Twenty-five percent (25%) of women and 16% of men with activity limitations had a psychological condition in addition to a chronic physical health problem (data not shown).

Some chronic diseases were more often accompanied by a psychological condition than others. For example, more than one in three women with bowel disorders, migraines, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and ulcers also had mood or anxiety disorders. In contrast, only about one in five women diagnosed with high blood pressure, cancer or the effects of a stroke had also been diagnosed with a psychological condition.

One-quarter of women with activity limitations live alone

As discussed earlier, living with activity limitations becomes increasingly common as people age. In fact, two-thirds of women with activity limitations are aged 50 or over. Their living arrangements reflect the age structure of an older population, that is, a higher concentration of one- and two-person households. Women with activity limitations are almost twice as likely as other women to live alone (26% versus 14%), and are only about half as likely to live with a spouse and children (15% versus 28%). Within the activity-limited population, men were less likely to live alone than women and more likely to live with their spouse in a couple only or with children
(Table 4).

Table 4
Women and men aged 15 and over, by living arrangement and activity limitations status, Canada, 2009

Living arrangement	Women		Men	
	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations
	percentage			
Individual living alone	26.2 *	14.4	18.1 *	13.1
Living with spouse/partner	31.8 *	26.4	39.3 *	28.4
Living with spouse/partner and children	14.6 *	27.7	21.2 *	28.9
Lone parent	8.1 *	6.5	1.3 [E]	1.6
Child living with parent(s), siblings	6.5 *	12.7	8.3 *	16.4
Other arrangements	12.8	12.2	11.8	11.6

* statistically significant difference from same sex without activity limitations at $p < 0.05$
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

The marital characteristics of women with activity limitations also reflect the fact that they are generally much older than women without activity limitations. Women with activity limitations were three times more likely to be widowed (17% versus 6% of other women) and almost twice as likely to be divorced or separated (14% versus 8%) (data not shown).

Women with activity limitations have less postsecondary education

Women with activity limitations are not as well-educated as other women: 42% have no more than high school compared with 33% of women without activity limitations. This disparity partly reflects the older age structure of the population with activity limitations, since seniors generally have lower levels of educational attainment. However, even when the population is restricted to women of prime working age (25- to 54-year-olds), those with activity limitations still have fewer educational credentials. They were twice as likely as women without activity limitations to have less than high school (13% versus 7.4%), and only two-thirds as likely to have a university degree (22% versus 32%). On the other hand, the likelihood that they had a community college diploma was about the same as that for women without activity limitations (Table 5).

Table 5
Women and men aged 15 and over, by educational attainment, age group and activity limitations status, Canada, 2009

Educational attainment	Women		Men	
	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations
	percentage			
Educational attainment (aged 15 and over)				
Less than high school	27.1 *	17.1	25.0 *	17.4
High school completion	14.8	16.3	13.7	15.7
Some postsecondary	8.4	8.4	7.4	8.1
Trades certificate or diploma	9.4 *	7.1	19.5 *	14.8
College/CEGEP diploma[1]	23.6 *	25.8	15.3 *	19.3
Bachelor's degree or above	13.7 *	23.0	15.9 *	22.1
Unknown	3.0	2.4	3.3	2.6
Educational attainment (aged 25 to 54)				
Less than high school	13.1 *	7.4	15.5 *	8.9
High school completion	14.2	14.6	16.3	15.2
Some postsecondary	9.4 *	6.2	8.2	6.0
Trades certificate or diploma	9.6	7.7	17.9	16.3
College/CEGEP diploma[1]	29.9	30.6	18.5 *	23.7
Bachelor's degree or above	21.6 *	31.5	20.8 *	27.2
Unknown	2.1 [E]	2.1	2.8 [E]	2.7

* statistically significant difference from same sex without activity limitations at $p < 0.05$

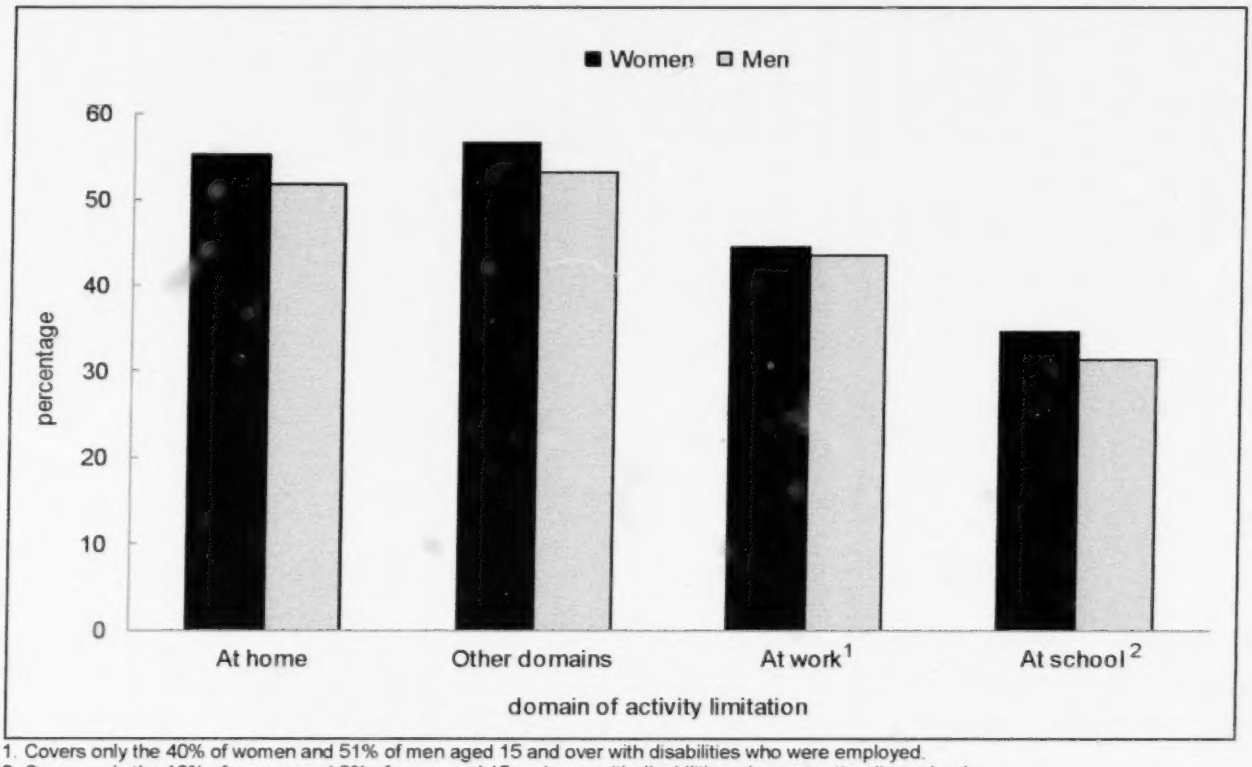
1. Includes university certificate below bachelor's level.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

Over half of women with activity limitations say activities at home are restricted by their condition

It is important to distinguish the domain in which a person's activity limitation manifests itself: having trouble functioning normally may have quite different implications depending on whether one is taking part in leisure events or discharging responsibilities at home or at work. Over half of women with activity limitations (55%) reported that their activities at home were often reduced by their long-term health problem or condition. A slightly larger percentage (57%) said their condition often curtailed their participation in leisure activities or created transportation problems. Similar proportions of men with activity limitations experienced restricted freedom of activity in each of these domains (Chart 3).

Chart 3
Domains in which a long-term health condition or problem limits activities among persons with activity limitations, Canada, 2009



1. Covers only the 40% of women and 51% of men aged 15 and over with disabilities who were employed.
2. Covers only the 10% of women and 9% of men aged 15 and over with disabilities who were attending school.

Note: "Other domains" includes transportation and leisure activities. Only the employed and students are included in the "At work" and "At school" categories.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

Among women with activity limitations who were working at a job in 2009, 45% reported that their activities at work were often restricted by their condition. Substantially fewer women attending school said their condition often affected their academic activities (34%).

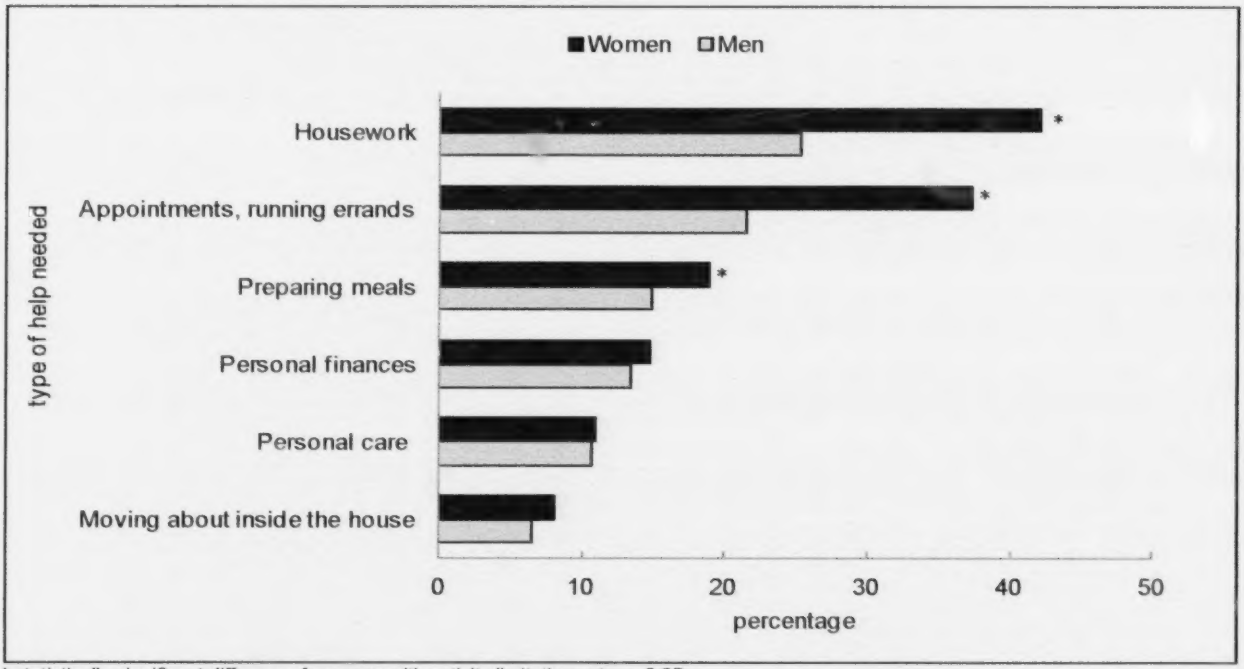
Half of women with activity limitations need help with everyday tasks

Just over half (52%) of women with activity limitations needed some help with at least one major activity of daily living. In contrast, only one-third (33%) of men with activity limitations said they needed help (data not shown).

This disparity between the sexes is due to the fact that men required much less assistance with household tasks and transportation. Women with activity limitations were much more likely to want help with housework (42% versus 25% of men), and with getting to appointments or running errands (37% versus 22% of men). Women also had a somewhat higher probability of needing help to prepare meals, at 19% compared with 15% of men with activity limitations (Chart 4).

On the other hand, men with activity limitations were just as likely as women to need help with personal finances, personal care and moving about inside their home.

Chart 4
Type of activities of daily living with which help is needed among persons with activity limitations aged 15 and over, Canada, 2009



* statistically significant difference from men with activity limitations at $p < 0.05$
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

Women of prime working age participate less in the workforce if they have activity limitations

In the week preceding the survey, about 60% of women aged 25 to 54 with activity limitations had paid work or were self-employed. This is a significantly lower rate of employment than that for other women of prime working age, 81% of whom were working.

However, among prime-working-age women who were employed, those with activity limitations were no different than other women in terms of the amount of hours they worked and the kinds of jobs they held. More than half (54%) of employed women aged 25 to 54 with activity limitations usually worked between 30 and 40 hours a week; just under one-quarter (24%) worked more hours. The same is true of women without activity limitations (Table 6).

Table 6
Women and men aged 25 to 54, by selected employment characteristics and activity limitations status, Canada, 2009

Employment characteristic	Women		Men	
	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations
	percentage			
Employment status				
Employed last week	60.2 *	80.6	66.6 *	88.9
Not employed last week	27.2 *	18.7	17.4 *	10.3
Permanently unable to work	12.6 *	0.7 E	16.1 *	0.8
Usual hours worked per week in current job[1]				
Less than 30 hours	22.1	16.7	6.6 E	4.2
30 to 40 hours	54.3	59.1	45.7	47.4
41 to 50 hours	13.7	16.4	24.9	27.3
More than 50 hours	9.9 E	7.8	22.8	21.1
Occupation[1]				
Management	5.8 E	7.7	13.7 E	13.2
Business, finance and administrative	24.8	28.6	15.8 E	12.3
Natural and applied sciences and related	4.1 E	3.6	7.2 E*	12.4
Health	12.7 E	13.5	F	2.2
Social science, education, government, culture, recreation, sport and religion	19.6	18.3	4.6 E*	9.0
Sales and service	25.5	22.1	17.0	14.6
Trades and blue-collar	7.6 E	6.2	37.8	36.2

* statistically significant difference from same sex without activity limitations at $p < 0.05$

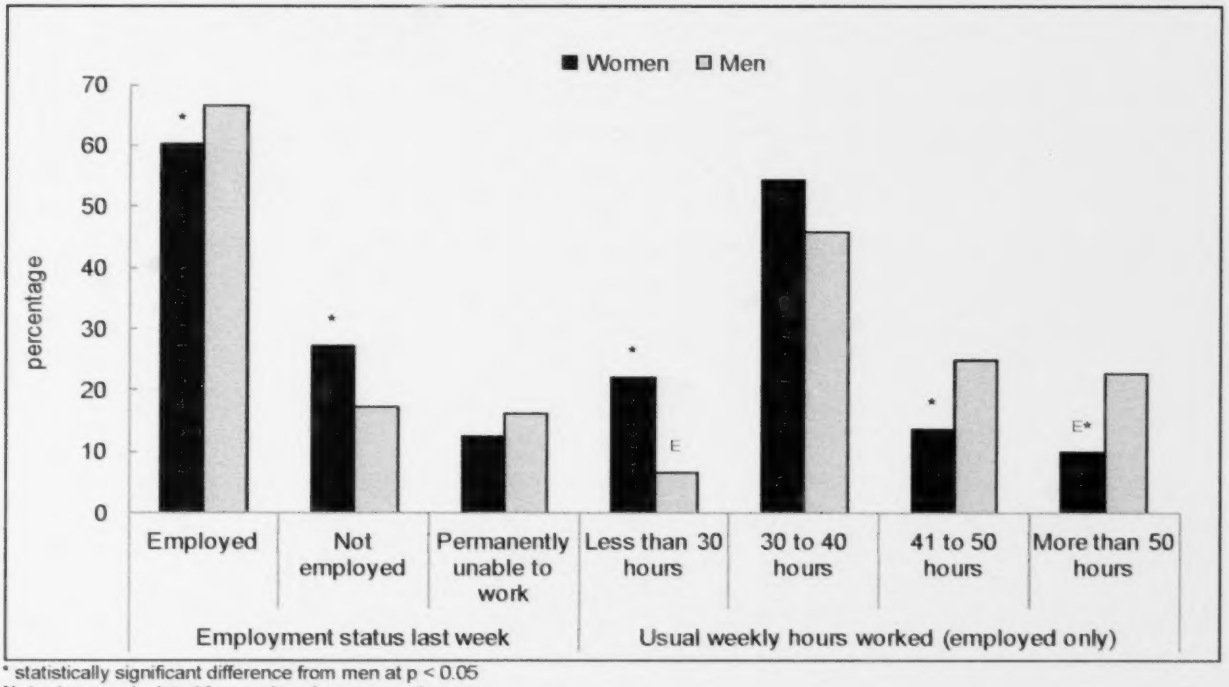
1. Employed persons only.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

The majority of working women aged 25 to 54 with activity limitations were employed either in sales and service jobs (25%) or jobs in business, finance and administration (25%). Only 6% were employed in management occupations. A significant proportion (20%) worked in occupations related to social sciences, education, government, culture and similar jobs; another 13% worked in health occupations. This distribution is very similar to that of women the same age without activity limitations.

Sixty-seven percent (67%) of men aged 25 to 54 with activity limitations had a job, a higher employment rate than that of women with activity limitations (60%). In contrast, men were twice as likely to work over 40 hours a week, at 48%, compared with 24% of women (Chart 5).

Chart 5
Women and men aged 25 to 54 with activity limitations, by selected employment characteristics, Canada, 2009



* statistically significant difference from men at $p < 0.05$
Note: hours calculated for employed persons only.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

Men with activity limitations were also twice as likely as women to work in management occupations, which are generally higher-paying white-collar jobs that are less physically demanding. On the other hand, the most common occupations held by men were trades and blue-collar jobs (38%) (Table 6), which may explain the higher proportion of men who attribute the cause of their activity limitation to their working conditions and job-related accidents (Table 2).

Accommodations in the workplace

In 2006, 545,000 women with activity limitations were employed in the workforce. According to the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, over 4 in 10 of these women (44%) reported that they needed at least one kind of accommodation from their employer in order to be able to work (Table 7).

The most common requirement, identified by almost one-quarter (23%) of working women with activity limitations, was a modified work day or reduced work hours. Somewhat fewer women (20%) needed a special chair or back support. About 14% needed to change or modify the duties of their job, and/or to have their workstation modified or replaced by an ergonomic workstation. Access to facilities—parking, washrooms and elevators—was needed by about 5% of women with activity limitations in order for them to do their work. Other, more specialized types of accommodation, including technical aids and human assistants, were required by fewer than 3% of employed women with activity limitations.

When women were asked if the accommodations they needed had been made available to them, the majority answered that they had. At least 8 in 10 women needing accessible washrooms, modified working hours, and help with physical access like handrails or ramps had obtained them from their employer. So had at least 7 in 10 women who needed an accessible elevator, parking, transportation, or modified workstation. At least 60% of women requiring a special chair or back support, job redesign, or other type of equipment, help or work arrangement said their employer had made the necessary help available. An accommodation had been received by half (50%) of the women who needed the support of a human assistant, such as a person to read for them, provide sign language interpretation, or be a job coach or personal assistant.

Table 7
Type of accommodation required to be able to work, employed persons with activity limitations, Canada, 2006

Type of accommodation	Requiring accommodation to work		Accommodation made available as a proportion of those requiring it	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	percentage			
Because of my condition, I require ... to be able to work				
No accommodation required	56 *	65	...	...
Modified hours or days or reduced work hours	23 *	17	82	82
A special chair/back support	20 *	13	68	64
Job redesign (modified or different duties)	14	14	67	64
A modified or ergonomic workstation	14 *	7	70	72
Appropriate parking	5 *	3 E	78	73
Accessible washrooms	5 *	2 E	88	97
An accessible elevator	4 *	2 E	79	73
Other equipment, help or work arrangement	4 E	3 E	62 E	73
Accessible transportation	4 E*	2 E	75	73 E
Human support, such as a reader, sign language interpreter, job coach or personal assistant	2 E	3 E	50 E	64
Handrails, ramps	2 E	2 E	81	F
Technical aids, such as a voice synthesizer, a TTY, an infrared system or portable notetaker	1 E	2 E	56 E	42 E
A computer with Braille, large print, voice recognition, or a scanner	F	1 E	64 E	51 E
Communication aids, such as Braille or large print reading material or recording equipment	F	F	x	F

* statistically significant difference between women and men at $p < 0.05$
Source: Statistics Canada, Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2006.

Women with activity limitations report 25% lower personal income than other women

Women with activity limitations have considerably lower average incomes than other women. According to the 2009 Canadian Community Health Survey, their average personal income was about three-quarters that of women without activity limitations, at $24,000 compared with $32,100 (Table 8).

These averages did vary considerably by age group, however. Among women aged 25 to 44, women with activity limitations reported an average personal income about 79% of that of other women, at $28,600 compared with $36,300; among women aged 45 to 64, the income gap between those with and without activity limitations was only 65%. Among seniors though, the gap narrowed again: women with activity limitations reported an average personal income that was 91% of that of other women ($21,400 versus $23,400).

Table 8
Average income of women and men aged 15 and over, by age group and activity limitations status, Canada, 2009

Income type and age group	Women			Men		
	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	Ratio	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	Ratio
	dollars					
Average personal income[1]						
Aged 15 years and over	**24,000**	**32,100**	**0.75**	**41,200**	**51,000**	**0.81**
15 to 24 years	12,000	13,100	0.92	17,400 [E]	16,300	1.07
25 to 44 years	28,600	36,300	0.79	48,700	57,300	0.85
45 to 64 years	25,600	39,400	0.65	46,400	65,000	0.71
65 years and older	21,400	23,400	0.91	31,400	39,300	0.80
Average household income[1]						
Aged 15 years and over	**54,500**	**78,100**	**0.70**	**65,400**	**86,700**	**0.75**
15 to 24 years	71,000	73,800	0.96	66,500	87,000	0.76
25 to 44 years	62,500	82,800	0.75	71,000	87,800	0.81
45 to 64 years	58,600	86,800	0.68	72,400	95,400	0.76
65 years and older	41,400	44,000	0.94	49,400	57,400	0.86

1. Includes only those who reported income.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

Average personal incomes also varied considerably depending on a woman's province of residence. In Atlantic Canada, the ratio of women with activity limitations to women without them was 81%, and it was 64% in Alberta (Table 9).

Table 9
Average income of women and men aged 15 and over, by region and activity limitations status, Canada, 2009

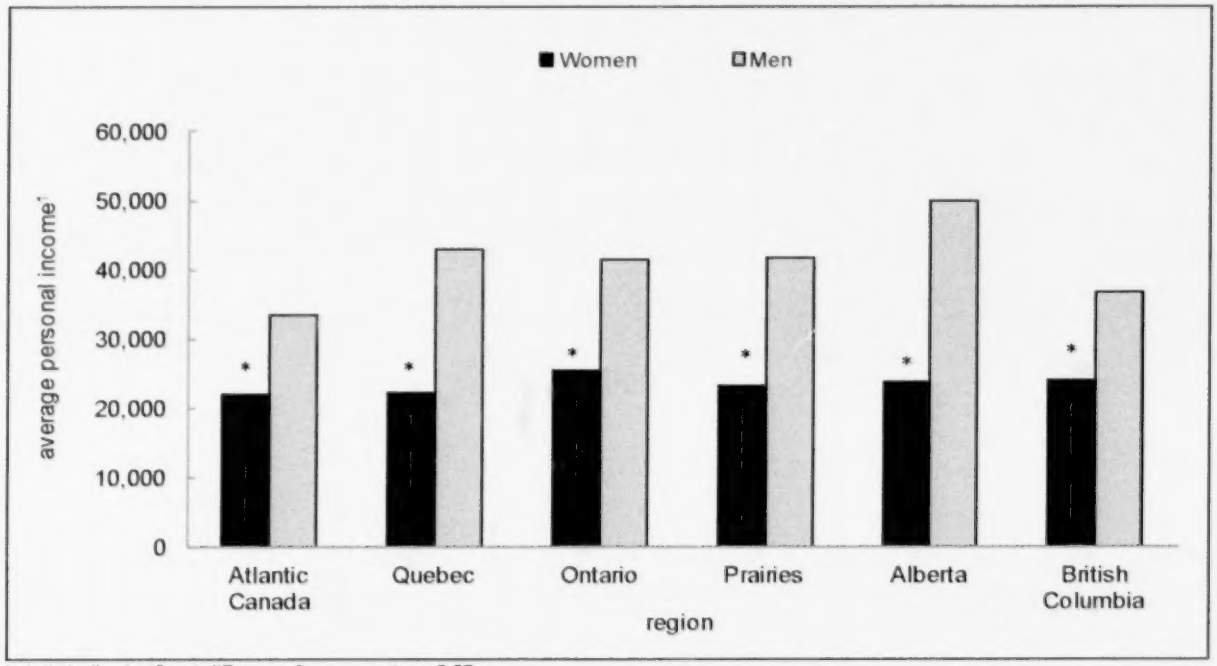
Income type and region	Women			Men		
	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	Ratio	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	Ratio
	dollars					
Average personal income[1]						
Canada	**24,000**	**32,100**	**0.75**	**41,200**	**51,000**	**0.81**
Atlantic Canada	22,000	27,200	0.81	33,500	43,400	0.77
Quebec	22,200	29,000	0.77	43,000	44,200	0.97
Ontario	25,400	33,400	0.76	41,300	53,000	0.78
Prairie provinces	23,300	32,100	0.73	41,700	49,200	0.85
Alberta	23,600	36,600	0.64	50,000	65,000	0.77
British Columbia[2]	23,900	33,700	0.71	36,700	51,400	0.71
Average household income[1]						
Canada	**54,500**	**78,100**	**0.70**	**65,400**	**86,700**	**0.75**
Atlantic Canada	50,800	65,200	0.78	49,300	73,300	0.67
Quebec	48,300	67,600	0.71	67,600	75,000	0.90
Ontario	55,200	82,600	0.67	65,200	92,200	0.71
Prairie provinces	51,300	77,400	0.66	67,800	87,600	0.77
Alberta	66,900	101,300	0.66	80,200	106,300	0.75
British Columbia[2]	58,600	75,900	0.77	61,200	83,900	0.73

1. Includes only those who reported income.
2. Includes Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

Men with activity limitations had lower personal incomes than other men, but they did much better than women. Their average personal income was $41,200, which was 72% higher than the average for women with activity limitations. The size of this disparity varied across the country; it was about 66% in Atlantic Canada and British Columbia and 47% in Alberta (Chart 6).

Chart 6
Average personal income of women and men with activity limitations, by region, Canada, 2009



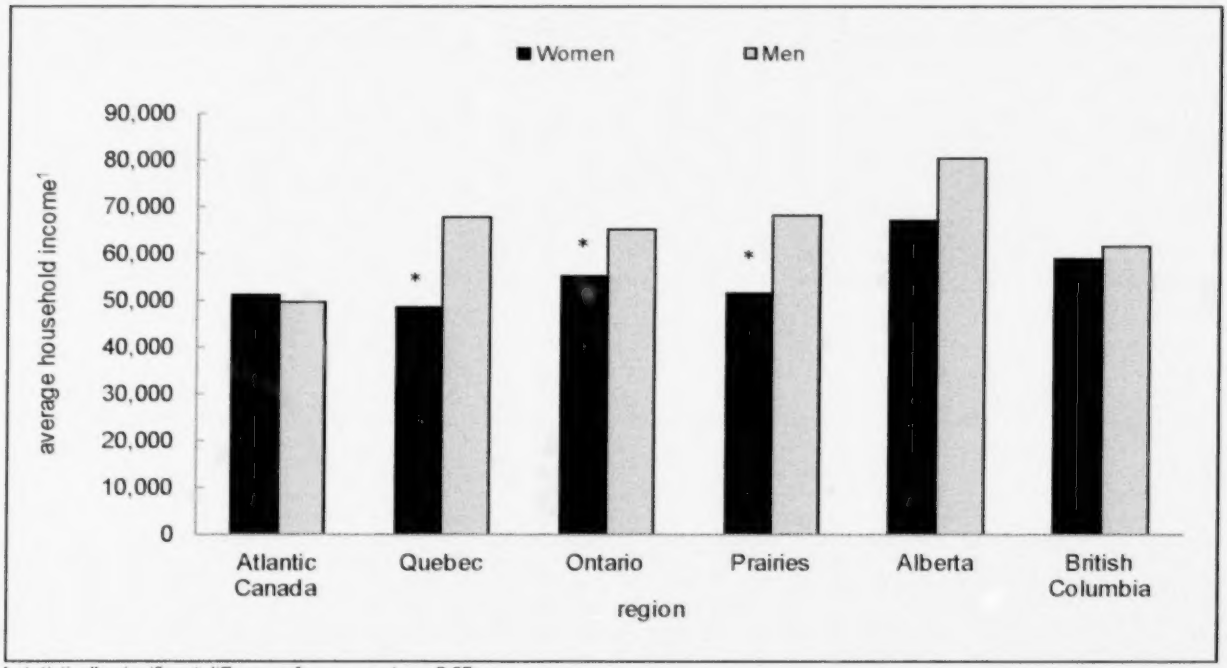
* statistically significant difference from men at $p < 0.05$
1. Includes only those who reported income.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

Household income gap even wider

At the household level, the income gap between women with and without activity limitations was even wider than for personal income. Average household income was $54,500 for women with activity limitations and $78,100 for those without, a difference of about 30%. As shown earlier, a significantly higher proportion of women with activity limitations live alone, which would account in part for this phenomenon. Also, as discussed earlier with regard to personal income, average household income can vary substantially depending on a woman's age (Table 8).

However, when comparing women and men with activity limitations, the gap between the sexes was smaller for household income (17%) than for personal income (42%). In fact, in Atlantic Canada and British Columbia, household income was roughly equivalent for both women and men with activity limitations (Chart 7).

Chart 7
Average household income of women and men with activity limitations, by region, Canada, 2009



* statistically significant difference from men at $p < 0.05$
1. Includes only those who reported income.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

No income gap when main source of income is the same

However, these overall income averages mask a somewhat more complicated story. In fact, the income gap between women with and without activity limitations largely disappears when their main source of income is the same. For example, women with activity limitations whose primary source of income is employment (paid work and self-employment) reported personal incomes of $37,300, statistically the same as that for women without activity limitations ($39,400). The same is true for most other personal income sources. The exception is income received mainly from pensions and investment—in this case, women with activity limitations averaged about $4,000 less, at $22,600 compared with $26,700 (Table 10).

The pattern is somewhat different for household income. Women with activity limitations live in lower-income households than those without activity limitations. When looking at specific income sources, women with activity limitations had less household income if its main source was from paid work or self-employment or from pensions and investments.

Table 10
Income of women and men aged 15 and over with activity limitations, by main source of income, Canada, 2009

Main source of income	Women		Men	
	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations
	dollars			
Paid work or self-employment				
Average personal income	37,300	39,400	59,500	57,300
Average household income	75,500 *	88,900	88,100 *	94,900
Pensions, investments[1]				
Average personal income	22,600 *	26,700	32,400 *	39,800
Average household income	41,700 *	46,900	48,300 *	58,600
Employment Insurance, Worker's Compensation				
Average personal income	18,800	21,200	22,700	26,600
Average household income	34,100	32,500	31,100	32,800
Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement, Social Assistance				
Average personal income	12,200	12,800	13,500	14,600
Average household income	18,500	19,300	18,500 *	22,300
Other[2]				
Average personal income	17,300	16,000	26,500	28,600
Average household income	30,000 *	41,200	44,100	47,500

* statistically significant difference from same sex without activity limitations at $p < 0.05$

1. Includes private pensions, Canada/Quebec Pension Plan, Registered Retirement Savings Plans and Registered Retirement Income Funds, other investments.
2. Includes child tax benefit, child support, alimony and other sources of income.

Note: Includes only those respondents who reported income.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

The majority of women with activity limitations report non-employment income as their main source of income

So if women's personal incomes do not differ much when they have the same main source of income, why is the overall average so much lower for women with activity limitations? One reason is that the majority of them rely on non-employment income. Compared with other women, they were half as likely to report paid work or self-employment as their principal source of personal income, (35% versus 68%); on the other hand, they were twice as likely to report pensions and investments (28% versus 12%) and three times as likely to rely on government transfers—that is, Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement and Social Assistance (21% versus 7%). Similar findings generally apply also to their main source of household income (Table 11).

Table 11
Women and men aged 15 and over, by main source of income and activity limitations status, Canada, 2009

Main source of income	Women		Men	
	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations
	percentage			
Main source of personal income				
No income	5.4	6.4	2.4 E	3.2
Paid work or self-employment	34.7 *	68.4	44.9 *	78.2
Pensions, investments[1]	28.3 *	12.0	30.3 *	12.0
Employment Insurance, Worker's Compensation	3.5 *	1.9	4.6 *	1.5
Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement, Social Assistance	21.1 *	6.8	13.4 *	3.4
Other[2]	7.0 *	4.5	4.4 *	1.7
Main source of household income				
No income	F	0.3 E	x	0.3 E
Paid work or self-employment	50.6 *	78.4	55.3 *	82.8
Pensions, investments[1]	27.8 *	12.5	27.3 *	11.5
Employment Insurance, Worker's Compensation	2.0 *	0.9	3.0 *	0.9
Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement, Social Assistance	15.1 *	5.5	11.5 *	3.2
Other[2]	4.2 *	2.3	2.8 E*	1.3

* statistically significant difference from same sex without activity limitations at $p < 0.05$

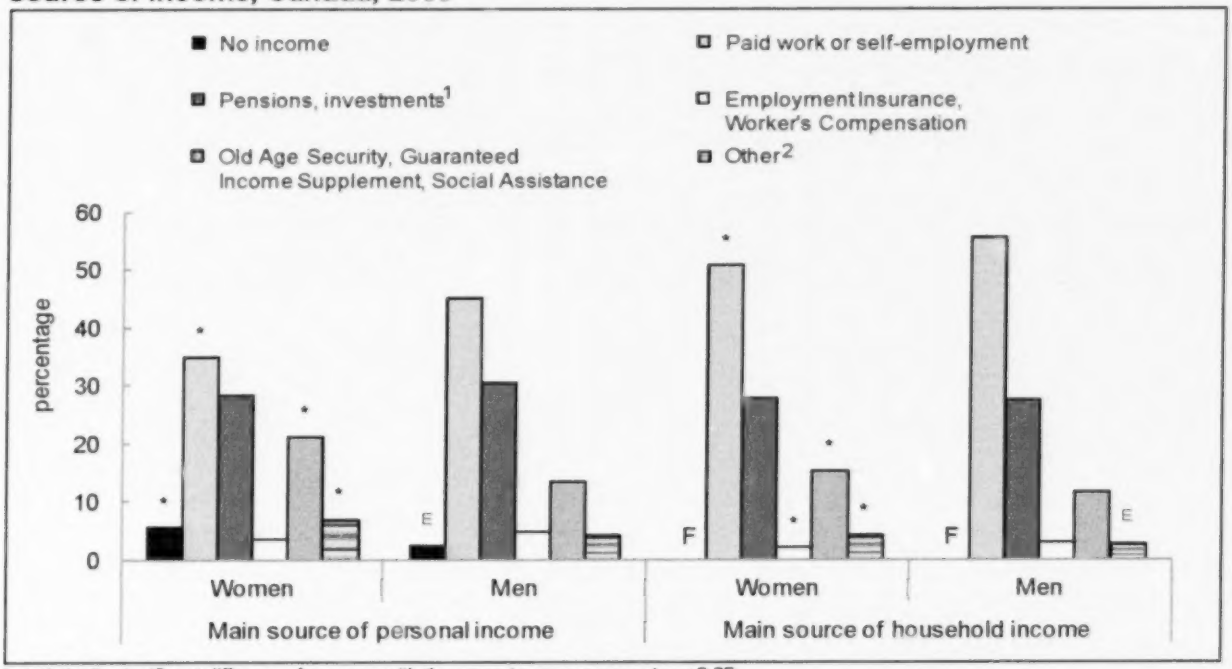
1. Includes private pensions, Canada/Quebec Pension Plan, Registered Retirement Savings Plans and Registered Retirement Income Funds, other investments.
2. Includes child tax benefit, child support, alimony and other sources of income.

Note: Includes only those respondents who reported income.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

When comparing women and men with activity limitations, men have a substantially higher probability of reporting employment as their main source of income, and a lower probability of relying on government transfers (Chart 8).

Chart 8
Distribution of women and men with activity limitations aged 15 and over, by main source of income, Canada, 2009



* statistically significant difference from men with the same income source at $p < 0.05$
1. Includes private pensions, Canada/Quebec Pension Plan, Registered Retirement Savings Plans and Registered Retirement Income Funds, other investments.
2. Includes child tax benefit, child support, alimony and other sources of income.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

Women with activity limitations score below normal on well-being measures

Across a range of subjective measures of well-being, women with activity limitations scored lower than other women. On the Health Utility Index that measures overall ability to function normally in everyday life, 70% had moderate to poor functional health, compared with 13% of women without activity limitations. They were also twice as likely to report that their mental health was not very good (47% compared with 24%) (Table 12).

Table 12
Distribution of women and men aged 15 and over, by selected measures of well-being and activity limitations status, Canada, 2009

Measure of well-being	Women		Men	
	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations
	percentage			
Health Utility Index (HUI)				
Good to full functional health	29.9 *	86.8	36.1 *	88.4
Moderate to poor functional health	70.1 *	13.2	63.9 *	11.6
Self-rated mental health				
Poor to fair	17.1 *	3.9	17.1 *	3.5
Good	30.1 *	20.3	29.1 *	19.6
Very good	29.7 *	38.1	29.3 *	36.8
Excellent	23.1 *	37.7	24.5 *	40.0
Self-rated general health[1]				
Poor to fair	43.8 *	7.2	43.2 *	7.0
Good	34.7 *	27.4	30.8	28.3
Very good	17.3 *	40.9	18.4 *	39.5
Excellent	4.2 *	24.5	7.6 *	25.1
Compared to last year, my health is...				
Better	18.1	19.2	16.7	18.5
The same	47.0 *	71.1	52.2 *	73.6
Worse	34.9 *	9.7	31.1 *	7.8
Life satisfaction				
Less satisfied with life	24.0 *	6.1	25.5 *	6.0
Satisfied with life	50.1 *	53.1	50.9 *	56.3
Very satisfied with life	25.9 *	40.9	23.6 *	37.7
Perceived life stress				
Low	28.3 *	33.1	30.5 *	36.9
Medium	37.5 *	43.4	37.4 *	42.8
High	34.2 *	23.5	32.1 *	20.3
Perceived work stress (employed only)				
Low	23.2 *	27.6	22.3 *	30.1
Medium	32.0 *	40.8	38.5	42.1
High	44.7 *	31.6	39.3 *	27.8

* statistically significant difference from the same sex without activity limitations at $p < 0.05$
1. Not only the absence of disease or injury but also physical, mental and social well-being.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.

Women with activity limitations rated their general life satisfaction much lower and their level of stress much higher than other women. While 26% of women with activity limitations reported being very satisfied with their lives, 41% of other women did so. Similarly, over one-third of women with activity limitations described their daily lives as high-stress, compared with fewer than one-quarter of women without activity limitations. Among women who were employed, a high level of stress was even more common, at 45% and 32%, respectively.

Much of the dissatisfaction that women with activity limitations express about their lives stems from the state of their health.[4] Even when women with activity limitations were asked to think about their health in more holistic terms—that is, not just as the presence (or absence) of any disease or illness, but also as their physical, mental and social well-being—over 4 in 10 (44%) described their general health as poor to fair. Furthermore, one-third (35%) said that their health had deteriorated since the previous year (Table 12).

In general, men with activity limitations do not score much differently than women on these measures of well-being. They were somewhat more likely than women to fall into the good to full functional health category as measured by the Health Utility Index, and as such were a little more likely to describe their general health as excellent, at 7.6% compared with 4.2% for women with activity limitations.

Women with activity limitations visit the doctor more and exercise less than other women

Not surprisingly, almost all women with activity limitations had visited a health professional in the 12 months preceding the survey. They were more than twice as likely to have gone to their family doctor or medical specialist five or more times in the previous year (60% versus 25% of other women). On average, they reported about 9 visits to a medical practitioner, compared with almost 4 for other women (Table 13).

Women with activity limitations were only half as likely as other women to be physically active on a daily basis. Over two-thirds were classified as inactive, based on the number of calories they burned doing physical activities each day. Comparing women and men with activity limitations, women were less likely to be active, at 13% versus 19%.

Reflecting their relative lack of physical activity, women with activity limitations were considerably more likely than other women to be overweight (31%) or obese (28%). On the other hand, they were less likely to be overweight than men with activity limitations.

4. Crompton, S. 2010. "Living with disabilities series: Life satisfaction of women with disabilities." *Canadian Social Trends* no. 89. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-008.

Table 13
Distribution of persons aged 15 and over by health behaviours and activity limitations status, Canada, 2009

Health behaviours	Women		Men	
	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations	With activity limitations	Without activity limitations
	percentage			
Have visited health professional in past 12 months	98.7 *	96.0	97.8 *	91.2
Visits to MD in past 12 months				
Low range (0 to 1)	9.6 *	33.4	17.1 *	50.0
Mid range (2 to 4)	30.6 *	41.1	33.3	34.4
High range (5 or more)	59.8 *	25.4	49.6 *	15.5
Level of daily leisure time and transportation activity[1]				
Active	12.5 *	26.4	19.3 *	33.3
Moderately active	18.4 *	26.4	21.9 *	25.8
Inactive	69.1 *	47.2	58.8 *	40.9
Body Mass Index[2]				
Underweight	3.4	3.8	1.4 [E]	1.2
Normal weight	36.9 *	54.4	31.4 *	40.6
Overweight	31.4 *	26.6	36.1 *	40.6
Obese	28.4 *	15.1	31.1 *	17.6
	average			
Number of MD visits	8.9 *	3.8	8.0 *	2.6

* statistically significant difference from the same sex without activity limitations at $p < 0.05$
1. Based on total daily Energy Expenditure (calories/kg/day). Transportation covers walking and bicycling.
2. Aged 18 and over only. International standard.
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, 2009.